DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 424 UD 031 546

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TITLE Hmong in America. Journey from a Secret War.
SPONS AGENCY National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-9636191-3-6
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 100p.
AVAILABLE FROM Chippewa Valley Museum Press, P.O. Box 1204, Eau Claire, WI 54702-1204.
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE Document Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; Chinese; Cultural Differences; *Hmong People; *Immigrants; Immigration; Language Minorities; *Limited English Speaking; Political Attitudes; *Refugees; Relocation; Vietnam War
IDENTIFIERS Laos; *Wisconsin (Eau Claire)

ABSTRACT

Since 1975, the United States has accepted more than 110,000 Laotian highlanders as refugees, the vast majority of whom are Hmong. The Hmong in America trace their Chinese ancestry back thousands of years, but their recent history is rooted in Laos where Hmong families escaped from China in the mid-1800s. It is difficult to overstate the culture shock experienced by Hmong resettling in the United States. With terrible memories of the East Asian war and refugee camps, they have arrived in a highly industrialized and technologically driven society. They have significant linguistic, educational, economic, cultural, and racial barriers. Most had not lived in a house with plumbing or electricity. Their traditional world view valued family and group welfare above all, but they are forced to deal with American individualism. By 1995 many Hmong refugees had become self-sufficient, but other recent arrivals faced the same problems, exacerbated by years in Thai refugee camps and memories of political conflict. The transition to American life is slow and difficult for newly arrived Hmong. This discussion of their adaptation to the United States focuses on the Hmong community of Eau Claire (Wisconsin) where the painful process of acculturation continues. An annotated bibliography lists 53 sources for further reading. (SLD)

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